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SUBJECT: INDONESIA RACES TO BUILD BSL-3 LABS

REF: A. JAKARTA 3314

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 1823

Classified By: EST&H OFFICER ANTHONY C. WOODS, REASON 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The avian influenza (AI) threat has sparked a race among Government of Indonesia (GOI) institutions to build Biosafety Containment Level 3 laboratories (BSL-3 labs), ostensibly to perform AI sequencing and other sophisticated procedures. At least seven GOI institutions hope to construct BSL-3 labs in the near future, with perhaps five having confirmed funding sources. With a single exception, the seven institutions will require significant technical assistance to operate their facilities safely and securely. In paras 7-9, we recommend Washington agencies consider offering appropriate assistance to facilities planning BSL-3 labs. USG assistance to the planned BSL-3 lab at the National Institute of Health Research and Development (Litbangkes) would require special handling: we favor USG assistance to this lab and the new Director General at Litbangkes, but not any that would benefit Dr. Erna Tresnaningsih, the Director of Litbangkes, Biomedical and Pharmacy Research and Development Center and a vocal opponent of the Naval Medical Research Unit,s (NAMRU-2) presence in Indonesia. Paras 11-27 contain background information on the seven institutions hoping to construct BSL-3 labs. End Summary

BSL-3 Labs Sprouting Up Everywhere

[1](#)2. (SBU) Although it has a modern pharmaceutical industry and a relatively well developed medical establishment, Indonesia only has three functioning BSL-3 labs. The private Bandung-based pharmaceutical firm Medion International operates two facilities essentially at the BSL-3 level, and

the state-owned pharmaceutical PT Biofarma operates a BSL-3 lab that focuses on efficacy testing of polio vaccines.

¶3. (SBU) This situation appears about to change. By our count, at least seven GOI-linked institutions now seek to build BSL-3 labs, with five reporting confirmed funding for construction.

With Confirmed Funding:

- The National Institute of Health Research and Development (Litbangkes) of the Ministry of Health (MOH);
- The Eijkmann Institute in Jakarta, a Jakarta-based non-profit research institute conducting basic research in medical molecular biology, tropical infectious diseases and biomolecular engineering. It received its budget for a BSL-3 lab from the Ministry of Research and Technology.
- The Institute of Human Virology and Cancer (IHVCB-UI) at the University of Indonesia.
- The Primate Research Center (PRC) at the Bogor Institute of Agriculture (IPB) in Bogor, West Java, which has completed construction of BSL-3 lab facility in cooperation with the University of Washington for HIV/AIDS research.
- The Research Institute for Veterinary Science (Balitvet) under the Ministry of Agriculture, s (MOA) Agency for Agricultural Research and Development.

Other Institutions Planning BSL-3 labs:

- The National Veterinary Drug Assay Laboratory (NVDAL) in Bogor, West Java, a MOA-linked lab that tests and certifies the quality and safety of veterinary drugs in Indonesia and documents biosecurity practices in animal medical research.

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- The Tropical Disease Center (TDC) of the University of Airlangga in Surabaya, East Java.

¶4. (C) This proliferation of planning for high-containment research and diagnostics facilities has proceeded without a coherent strategy for a national laboratory system that Indonesia could afford over the long run. Little understanding exist among the institutions seeking BSL-3 labs re the considerable financial, human resources, safety, and security implications of operating high biosafety facilities.

It remains unclear whether the GOI would adequately fund them in out years or whether they could compete effectively for grant funding. In addition, most experts, including some in the MOH, agree that Indonesia does not need BSL-3 capability for AI pandemic preparedness; some fear that a focus on building BSL-3 labs could divert vital resources from the more critical needs of AI surveillance and case investigation and containment.

Technical Assistance Needed

¶5. (C) The GOI effort to build up Indonesia, s BSL-3 labs with Litbangkes playing a lead role seems a political reality. In our judgment, each institution listed above, except the Primate Research Center in Bogor, will require significant technical assistance to operate properly a BSL-3 lab. Many of Indonesia, s labs, including those at the BSL-2 level, fail to observe minimum biosecurity and biosafety protocols, especially in remote regions. The rush to build as many as seven new BSL-3 labs therefore poses biosecurity risks and challenges.

¶6. (SBU) The MOA and MOH have approached donors, including the U.S., Japan, Singapore and Australia, for help in building BSL-3 labs in the context of fighting AI and preventing a possible pandemic. During a February 8 meeting with the Ambassador, Coordinating Minister for Peoples, Welfare Aburizal Bakrie repeatedly appealed for U.S. funds to establish BSL-3 labs at the University of Indonesia and Bogor Insitute of Agriculture. He said the GOI needs USD 10

million to fund the two labs.

¶7. (C) We see three compelling reasons to offer USG assistance to the BSL-3 sector in Indonesia:

--Biosecurity issues: Early USG involvement through technical and financial assistance would shape the process of building such high-security and potential dangerous labs, increase U.S. influence over the development of the sector, and increase our access to information on the operation of such facilities. U.S. assistance could help ensure that the facility and its staff maintain competence in pathogen security. By working with the facility during initial design, construction, and equipping, communication will become established between the lab and the USG that would prove valuable in the future. Providing assistance would also give us a more sophisticated understanding of which labs would work on disease agents of interest.

--Scientific collaboration: Given Indonesia's population, geographical location in the tropics, and unparalleled biodiversity, research here offers excellent opportunities for scientific collaboration on infectious disease and other issues.

--Supporting NAMRU-2: Our Naval Medical Research Unit (NAMRU-2), based at the MOH, operates one of the most sophisticated public sector laboratories in Indonesia. It

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has played a central role in investigating and studying AI in Indonesia. NAMRU-2 has faced consistent opposition from Dr. Erna Tresnaningsih, who oversees all labs in Litbangkes and has played a lead role in the agency's plans to build a BSL-3 lab. NAMRU-2, well-placed to collaborate with USG agencies interested in assisting Indonesia's BSL-3 labs, could providing such assistance and demonstrate the benefit of keeping NAMRU-2 in Indonesia, one of the Mission's priorities. The USG and GOI have begun negotiating an MOU on NAMRU-2's status, and one of the sticking points remains the MOH's insistence that NAMRU-2 build Litbangkes a lab. Should we assist Litbangkes, we should work directly with Dr. Triono Soendoro, the highly regarded new Director General at Litbangkes, and avoid contact with Tresnaningsih. Soendoro told NAMRU-2 the week of May 5 that he favors NAMRU's contributing long-term support and maintenance for the BSL-3 lab at Litbangkes.

¶8. (SBU) We have seen significant USG contact with the institutions seeking BSL-3 labs. Dr. Gregory Stewart from the State Department's Office of Chemical and Biological Weapons Threat Reduction held discussions with a range of GOI and donor contacts on Indonesia's plans to build BSL-3 labs February 26 - March 3, 2006 (Ref A). Dr. Jason Rao, Senior Program Coordinator for Nonproliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Expertise (NWMDE) at the State Department, met a similar group of individuals in March, including WHO Country Representative Dr. Georg Peterson.

¶9. (C) We urge USG engagement with relevant Indonesian agencies to educate them on building and operating BSL-3 facilities. The USG could offer equipment and training in BSL-3 lab protocols and design, and fund the equipping and maintenance of labs. We could gain long-term influence and access by providing multi-year maintenance and support contracts required to insure that a GOI BSL-3 lab supported by the UGS runs safely and securely.

¶10. (U) Background information on institutions planning BSL-3 labs follows in paras 11-27.

Litbangkes

¶11. (SBU) The MOH's BSL-3 lab would sit at the National Institute of Health Research and Development (Litbangkes),

which shares its facilities with NAMRU-2 and focuses on public health research. Dr. Erna Tresnaningsih, who oversees all labs in Litbangkes, has touted her new responsibility for developing the BSL-3 labs, declaring that Litbangkes would build one by the end of 2006. The MOH,s Director of Vector-borne Disease Eradication Hariadi Wibisono has stated that a GOI-built BSL3-lab would match the standards of the WHO reference lab in Hong Kong. (Comment: We do not see this as credible given the current level of lab capability in Indonesia).

¶12. (SBU) In recent meetings with Dr. Stewart (Feb 27) and Dr. Rao,s team (March 23), Tresnaningsih said she hopes the Litbangkes BSL-3 lab would become the main reference lab for other planned BSL-3 labs. She said she has received about USD 3 million from Parliament to build the lab by the end of ¶2006. The USG delegations visited the 6-floor building that will house the BSL-3 lab. The facilities, while freshly painted, remained devoid of furniture and equipment. Tresnaningsih said a separate lift would exist to the sixth floor requiring special security access. She also provided the team a lay-out of the laboratory: about 42 square meters (452 square feet), divided into two rooms, virology and

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bacteriology.

¶13. (SBU) Dr. Tresnaningsih told Dr. Stewart that she needs a USG-funded BSL-3 lab consultant immediately for about two months to help with planning and basic construction. She added that Litbangkes needs funds for equipment to outfit the laboratory (e.g., PCR and Elisa capabilities). Dr. Erna emphasized that the U.S. assistance should go directly to Litbangkes, and not via other U.S. agencies like NAMRU-2. Responding to our observation of NAMRU-2,s important role in infectious diseases research (especially AI), Tresnaningsih warned that she would build the lab with or without U.S. help. She claimed that other countries including Japan and Singapore stand ready to step into the breach. While she pleaded with Dr. Stewart for help, Dr. Erna bluntly told Dr. Rao,s team that since she already had funds to complete her BSL3 lab by year,s end, she did not need foreign help.

¶14. (SBU) Litbangkes Secretary Dr. Titte K. Adimidjaja noted her organization remains open to the possibility of receiving additional funding to complete the lab, an admission that current funds might prove insufficient. Tresnaningsih also mentioned ongoing discussions with David Trudil from New Horizons Diagnostics Corporation, who she hopes will help her build the BSL-3 lab. Trudil visited Indonesia for the third time 27-29 March to continue his consultations on an MOU with senior MOH officials. Trudil told us March 27 that Dr. Tresnaningsih had admitted her staff lacks the necessary skills to operate a BSL-3 lab.

¶15. (SBU) Comment: Tresnaningsih,s obsession with speed comes from her need to spend budgeted funds by the end of the fiscal year, December 31 and her determination to exclude NAMRU-2 from any possible involvement in the BSL-3 process. She promised, however, that she would proceed cautiously with the lab,s construction and operation, and admitted she needs technical aid. Despite visits to BLS-3 labs and discussions with lab experts in Singapore, Tresnaningsih did not seem to understand much about BSL-3 labs and their financial, safety and security implications.

The Eijkman Institute

¶16. (U) The Eijkman Institute for Molecular Biology in Jakarta, inaugurated in 1995, a non-profit, GOI-funded research institute, conducts basic research in medical molecular biology, tropical infectious diseases and bimolecular engineering. It falls under the line authority of the State Ministry of Research and Technology, which funded its BSL-3 budget, but reports directly to the

President. Eijkman has 200 scientists, several with post doctoral degrees. In meetings with Dr. Stewart and Dr. Rao, s team, institute director Dr. Marzuki welcomed possible US assistance and confided that the GOI had given him USD 2.5 million to build a BSL-3 lab that would focus on emerging disease research. He said core functions of the lab would include conducting research on genomic and pathology; acting as a back up for diagnostic and testing activities; and in an emergency (e.g., a pandemic), supporting diagnostic capacity for large samples.

¶17. (SBU) Dr. Mazurki said the institute, s planned lab would be 50 square meters (538 square feet) in size, divided into two labs, one for avian influenza and the other for tuberculosis, a leading killer in Indonesia. He said that he has guaranteed funding for 2-3 years to cover maintenance and operational costs. Dr. Mazurki noted that Eijkman has a very tight deadline to finish its lab by the end of 2006. Dr.

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Herawati Sudoyo, Principal Research Fellow and Executive Manager, told Dr. Rao that they would start building the BSL3 in March 2006. (Note: Our contacts confirmed May 11 that the institute had in fact laid the foundation of the lab last month). Dr. Mazurki also stressed that Eijkman's BSL-3 lab would &back stop8 the Litbangkes BSL-3 lab, a comment that reflects Litbangkes, presumed primacy in BSL-3 matters for the GOI despite Eijkman, s superior capacity to manage labs. Dr. Mazurki also observed that BSL-3 labs, now fashionable, require above all well-trained people. He recognized that he did not yet have qualified personnel to run a BSL-3 lab.

¶18. (SBU) Dr. Marzuki said that Eijkman needs experts (preferably U.S.) to provide advice in building a BSL-3 lab and warmly welcomed possible collaboration with NAMRU-2, especially in engineering and technical training. Dr. Marzuki proudly noted his labs, prowess, such as its DNA tests that identified the Australian Embassy and Bali bombers in 13 days. As a result, he continued, the police now rely on Eijkman for forensic analysis and training for which it received USD 1 million in special funding in 2006.

¶19. (SBU) Comment: We come away impressed by the quality of Eijkman, s lab facilities and researchers. The facility appears well-equipped and modern, and seems to follow good laboratory safety and security practices. Dr. Stewart, Dr. Rao, and other experts see Eijkman as the best prepared Indonesian organization to absorb a major and costly upgrade to BSL-3 standards. Its research into diseases of dangerous pathogens, and work with various law enforcement agencies for forensic investigations best justifies establishment of a BSL-3 facility. Eijkman will likely continue to play an important role in forensic investigations of potential deliberate or accidental releases of dangerous pathogens. End Comment.

Institute of Human Virology and Cancer (IIVCB)

¶20. (SBU) Coordinating Minister for Peoples, Welfare Bakrie has told us several times he chose the University of Indonesia, s (UI) IIVCB as one of two locations his Ministry favors to develop a BSL-3 lab. UI and the University of Maryland co-founded this facility with the primary goal of researching the genomic aspects of the HIV virus in Indonesia, s AIDS, patients and other infectious diseases, including avian influenza. IIVCB, s Head Professor Mardiasuti told USG visitors in late March that he saw the facility as a &BSL-2 plus8 clinical microbiology lab, with a staff that includes three professors, seven PhDs and nine technicians. She said the lab focuses on SARS, tuberculosis and dengue research and diagnostic training. The university requires end-use agreements before shipping biological materials out of the facility and asked for guidance on appropriate inventory methods and an inspection checklist that covers safety and biosecurity. Our contacts tell us the

BSL-3 lab will become operational in 5-6 months, perhaps sooner. Dr. Mardiasuti said it would measure 45 square meters (484 square feet). IIVCB scientists admit they need expert advice and training.

IPB,s Primate Research Center

¶21. (U) The Primate Research Center (PRC) at the Bogor Institute of Agriculture (IPB) in Bogor, West Java has a newly completely U.S.- manufactured, BSL-3 modular facility for HIV/AIDS research. PRC Director Dr. Joko Pamungkas told us on March 21 that the University of Washington had just

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completed a modular BSL-3 lab at the PRC for HIV primate work. Pamungkas, accompanied by Dr. Michael Agy from the Washington National Primate Center of the University of Washington and Dr. William Morton from Paris Non-Human Primate Inc, said a private company in Texas had built the lab but WNPC would pay a private contractor to maintain it.

¶22. (U) Pamungkas said the PRC collaborates with three U.S. institutions: the University of Washington Regional Primate Research Center, the Oregon Regional Primate Research Center, and the Bowman Gray School of Medicine at Wake Forest University. The Center,s seeks to provide animal models for AIDS-related research. According to Dondin Sajuthi, the institute,s Director, the core mission of the facility is to conserve Indonesia,s endemic primate species and optimize its use in biomedical research. Principal Research Programs include primate breeding and biomedical research using primates as models for human diseases.

BALITVET

¶23. (U) The Research Institute for Veterinary Science (Balitvet) remains the only veterinary research body in Indonesia. It falls under the MOA,s Agency for Agricultural Research and Development and reports to the Central Research Institutes for Animal Science (CRIAS). Balivet,s mandate includes prevention, diagnosis and treatment of animal diseases. The institute has three public service units: diagnostic services, culture collection, and a production unit. The diagnostic unit serves as the national reference laboratory for diagnosing animal diseases. The production unit develops prototype animal vaccines for commercialization. The institute has five research departments: bacteriology, virology, toxicology and mycology, pathology, and parasitology. It focuses on AI (H5N1), anthrax, Newcastle, infectious bursal disease, and Gumboro.

¶24. (U) Balivet remains one of but four labs in Indonesia authorized to diagnose or research anthrax, endemic in 17 of Indonesia,s 26 provinces. The institute has a new building intended to house a zoonotic research department, but a lack of funding has meant the lab has not become functional. The design of the facility favors an international standard BSL-2 lab, but seems to prohibit construction of a BSL-3 lab without major redesign.

¶25. (SBU) Balivet Director Dr. Abdul Adjid told Dr. Stewart in late March that his agency had received Rp 8 billion (USD 869,565) from the government to build a BSL-3 lab. Another Balivet official told Dr. Rao that Balivet has received Rp 16 billion (USD 1.7 million) to buy equipment, and an extra Rupiah 7 to 8 billion (USD 760,800) for miscellaneous costs. Dr. Adjid added that the building that would house the institute,s BSL-3 lab while basically finished would require some modifications -- a fact we confirmed with a subsequent visit. Dr. Adjid and Dr. Indrawati Sendow, Head of the Virology Department and Project Manager of the BSL-3 lab, warmly welcomed the possibility of technical and financial help from Dr. Stewart and other USG entities. Indrawati later admitted to Dr. Rao,s team that Balivet has had

problems with funding and obtaining references for contractors and consultants. She also admitted that Balivet is totally unprepared to operate a BSL-3 facility.

Bogor Animal Medical Center

¶26. (SBU) The GOI established the Veterinary Drug Assay

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Laboratory (BBPMSOH) in Bogor, West Java in 2002 to ensure the quality of veterinary drugs in Indonesia. The BBPMSOH received financial aid from the MOA,s Directorate General of Livestock Services and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The GOI upgraded the facility and changed its name in December 2003 to the National Veterinary Drug Assay Laboratory (NVDAL). Its main functions include: a) testing and certifying the quality and safety of veterinary drugs produced in and imported into Indonesia; and b) documenting the biosecurity of animal medical research. Sources tell us that BPMSOH wants to build a BSL-3 lab but we have few details.

Tropical Disease Center

¶27. (SBU) The Tropical Disease Center (TDC) of the University of Airlangga in Surabaya, East Java, established in 1998 with Japanese funding, has six full-time and sixty part-time researchers and 22 technicians. TDC Chairman Dr. Yoes Prijatna Dachlan told us the TDC seeks to become a top global research institute and a leader in science and technology in the field of tropical medicine. The Japanese Society for Promoting Sciences supports the TDC in its research and training activities.

TDC officials told us that the university will cooperate with Tokyo University to develop a BSL-3 Lab at its facility. They added that UNAIR plans to seek cooperative funding from the U.S. National Institute of Health (NIH). They said the lab would do research on AI as well as other dangerous infectious diseases such as the Ebola virus. The facilities seemed in apparent disuse, but in good condition and likely could accommodate a BSL-3 upgrade. The TDC,s medical staff seems competent, but, like their counterparts in other labs, would require training to handle a BSL-3 facility.

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